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CONSTANTINOPLE AND EARLY ARMENIAN LITERATURE

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Constantine I the Great (306-37) established Constantinople in 330 as his new capital at Byzantium and named it after himself. Over the centuries an Armenian community gradually developed there, the process greatly accelerating after the fall of the city to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed Fatih in 1453. This essay is concerned only with the earliest period, concentrating on the importance of the Armenian link with Constantinople in the development of early Armenian literature.

The historian Ghazar Parpetsi describes in some detail the building of the new capital on the site of the earlier city.¹ He explains, quite correctly, the advantages of the peninsula, encircled on all sides by the sea except for a short stretch of dry land on the western side. From then on, says Ghazar, streams of wisdom have been flowing from the royal capital, where the greatest scholars from all regions of Greece are anxious to shine. Movses Khorenatsi gives a more detailed picture of Constantinople, naming several of the buildings on the older site of Byzantium.² Unlike Ghazar, he states that Constantine I named the city "New Rome," but "the world" popularly called it Constantinople. The foundation of such an important capital was also known to Armenians from other sources that deal with the reign of the emperor Constantine—for

¹ Ghazar Parpetsi, *Patmutiun Hayots ev tught ar Vahan Mamikonian*, ed. Galust Ter-Mkrchian and Stepan Malkhasian (Tiflis: Aragatip Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1904; reprinted Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1985); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *The History of Lazar P'arpec'i* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 3-5.

² Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutunian (Tiflis: Aragatip Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), Bk II, ch. 88.

example, the translation of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates Scholasticus.³

Early Armenian Visitors to Constantinople

Ghazar mentions that he had studied in Roman territory, that is, in the Eastern Roman Empire, the area now known as Byzantium,⁴ while Movses explicitly states that he visited Constantinople himself.⁵ These historians were of course writing well after the invention of the Armenian script and the development of an original literature in the Armenian language. But contacts had been established between Constantinople and Armenia prior to the invention of the Armenian script by Mesrop Mashtots and the beginning of writing in the Armenian language.

In the well known story of the conversion of King Trdat to Christianity, Agatangelos provides an account of a journey that the king and Saint Gregory the Illuminator undertook in order to visit the emperor Constantine and to congratulate him on his own conversion to Christianity. He claims that Trdat and Gregory went to the old Rome in Italy, and there concluded a pact of mutual aid and support.⁶ Although the visit to Rome of an earlier Trdat in the reign of the emperor Nero attracted much attention and was described in great detail by Dio Cassius and Suetonius,⁷ this later visit of Trdat is not mentioned in Greek or Latin sources. None-

³ Socrates Scholasticus, *Sokratay Skolastikosi ekeghetsakan patmutiun ev patmutiun varuts srboyn Silbestrosi episkoposin Hrovmay*, ed. M. Ter-Movsesian (Echmiadzin: Catholicosate of Echmiadzin, 1897), Bk I, ch. 16; English translation of the second, shorter, Armenian version, Robert W. Thomson, *The Armenian Adaptation of the Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001). For the founding of Constantinople, see Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), Bk III, chs. 47-49; C. Sanspeur, “La version arménienne de la Visio Constantini, BHG 396,” *Handes Amsorya* 88 (1974): 307-20.

⁴ Ghazar Parpetsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, p. 185.

⁵ Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, Bk III, ch. 62.

⁶ Agatangelos, *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. Galust Ter-Mkrchian and Stepan Kanyiants (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosians, 1909; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1980); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Agathangelos: History of the Armenians* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1976).

⁷ For the visit of this Trdat to Rome in the first century, see Dio Cassius, *Epitome of Book LXIII*; Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, XIII, and XXX, 6 for Trdat as a “magus,” Latin and Greek texts with English translation in the Loeb Classical Series.

theless, Constantine did receive innumerable delegations of foreign dignitaries in his new capital, the New Rome, as described by the historian Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Life of Constantine*:

There were constant diplomatic visitors who brought valuable gifts from their homelands. . . . We saw before the outer palace gates waiting in a line remarkable figures of barbarians, with their exotic dress, their distinctive appearance, the quite singular cut of hair and beard. . . . The faces of some were red, of others whiter than snow, of others blacker than ebony or pitch . . . [Eusebius elaborates on their various gifts and treasures]. . . . The emperor responded with equal gifts. . . . He honoured the most distinguished of them with Roman titles, so that very many now longed to remain here, forgetting any thought of returning to their homes.⁸

As for the visit to Rome of the newly converted Trdat with Saint Gregory in the fourth century, early Armenian writers refer frequently to the mutual pact between their king and the emperor Constantine.⁹ The first reference to this pact occurs in the *Buzandaran* in the reign of King Tiran (338-50?).¹⁰ In response to a request from the Armenians, who recalled the treaty of alliance, the Greeks sent an army to help repulse an invasion of the Persian shah. The description of the Persian defeat is somewhat rhetorical: supposedly the emperor went himself as a spy to reconnoitre the Persian camp disguised as a cabbage-seller! At a later date, the Armenian patriarch Nerses was sent to the imperial palace,¹¹ "because of the existence of an alliance between the realm of Armenia and the emperor of the Greeks."¹² Although there are problems

⁸ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Bk IV, ch. 7; quotation from the translation in Cameron and Hall.

⁹ Later the tradition takes on a life of its own with fabulous elaborations. See details in Robert W. Thomson, "Constantine and Trdat in Armenian Tradition," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 50 (1997): 277-89.

¹⁰ The Armenian text of the *Buzandaran* was attributed to Pavstos Buzand, *Pavstosi Buzandatsvoy Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. Kerope Patkanian (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1883; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984); trans. Nina G. Garsoian, *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk')* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), Bk III, ch. 21.

¹¹ On both occasions, the *Buzandaran* only refers to the *palat*, not to Constantinople by name.

¹² *Buzandaran*, Bk IV, ch. 5.

with the dating of these visits, the important point is that the author of the *Buzandaran* emphasized the long-standing treaty of friendship.

This appears again in the famous work of Eghishe, *Vasn Vardanay ev Hayots paterazmin* (The History of Vardan and the Armenian War). In 450, the Armenian delegation seeking help after the Persian invasion took with them a letter. This document recalls Roman assistance in restoring King Trdat to his throne, and states that he received the faith in Christ from the archbishop of Rome. This is somewhat at variance with the tradition known to Agatangelos.¹³ More relevant here is the statement in Eghishe that when the Armenian request and the records of their ancestors were presented to Theodosius II (408-50), confirmation of the same covenant was found in Greek books. The later historian Sebeos also emphasizes the pact that had been agreed upon between Constantine and Trdat. In 572, a different Vardan Mamikonian had rebelled against the Persians and killed their governor in Dvin; but he was forced to take refuge in Constantinople. The emperor Justin II (565-78), confirming the old pact, sent an imperial army to support the Armenians. Subsequently, the Persians suffered a defeat at the hands of a Greek army.¹⁴

The visit of the second Vardan to Constantinople was of some consequence, for the Armenians were pressured to accept Greek Orthodoxy in an attempt to enforce reunion of the churches. On this occasion Vardan at first refused, stating that his church authorities would not permit it; however, he summoned Armenian clerics to discuss the question. The gathering, which ended with Armenian submission, was convoked at the Cathedral of Saint

¹³ Eghishe, *Vasn Vardanay ev Hayots paterazmin*, ed. Ervand Ter-Minasyan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Literature, 1957; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1993), p. 72; trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Elishe: History of Vardan and the Armenian War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Here the emphasis on Rome as a source of faith suggests the influence of the legend of Silvester. The *Life of Silvester* was translated into Armenian in 677. A revised and shortened version was then added to the “shorter” Socrates in 695/96. For details, see Manea S. Shirinyan, “Ricerche sulla *Storia ecclesiastica* di Socrate Scolastico e sulle sue versioni armene,” *Annali di Ca’Foscari* 33 (1994): 151-67.

¹⁴ Sebeos, *Patmutiun*, ed. Georg V. Abgaryan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1979); trans. Robert W. Thomson and James Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999 [pub. 2000]), pp. 67-68.

Sophia, and from that time on a tradition arose that the eastern door was called "the door of the Armenians." Later sources referring to this tradition confuse the date and associate the Armenian-Greek meeting with the much larger fifth ecumenical council held in 553.¹⁵

There is a long tradition in Armenian sources about this "Armenian door" of Saint Sophia. It was later adapted to the interests of the Bagratuni family after their rise to power in the ninth century, despite its earlier association with the Mamikonians, to which noble family this Vardan, and his more famous predecessor, belonged. This "Armenian door" has been misinterpreted as referring to an Armenian quarter of the city of Constantinople.¹⁶ There is no evidence for such an Armenian quarter in the vicinity of Saint Sophia in the sixth century, nor does the Armenian term *dur* or *durn* (door) signify a quarter. Nevertheless, it was the establishment of ecclesiastical contacts and similar ties of this nature, beginning with Mashtots and his pupils, which influenced the development of Armenian literature.

Koriun, the biographer of Mashtots, states that in his devising of an individual script for Armenian Mashtots was assisted by Rufinus, a scribe of Greek literature in Samosata. The invention was thus effected in a city of Syria which had a significant Greek population. This emphasizes the twofold background which from the very beginning had characterized the Armenian Church and also profoundly affected the development of Armenian literature—the influence of the Syrian and the Greek traditions.

Samosata and Edessa, with their mixed populations of Greek and Syriac speakers, were important early centers of Christianity close to Armenia. But the missionary and educational activity of Mashtots and his pupils was carried out in eastern Armenia—the much larger part of the country under Iranian suzerainty since the partition of 387.¹⁷ It was only after he had secured the success of his enterprise there that Mashtots crossed the border to seek im-

¹⁵ See the detailed discussion of these events in Gérard Garitte, *Narratio de Rebus Armeniae* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1952), pp. 175-254.

¹⁶ See the Armenian texts quoted in Haïg Berbérian, "Les Arméniens ont-ils acheté une des portes de Sainte-Sophie?" *Byzantion* 20 (1950): 5-12.

¹⁷ See map in Robert H. Hewsen, "The Geography of Armenia," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1: *The Dynastic Periods*, ed. Richard G. Hovannissian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 97.

perial permission to teach the new script to Armenians in Roman territory. Koriun gives few dates for events, but it was before the year 425 that Mashtots arrived in Constantinople.¹⁸ He traveled by public transport since his visit had the approval of the emperor Theodosius II. This is a rare reference in Armenian to the Roman transport system, the *cursus publicus*, or in Greek, *dromos*.

Along the roads of the empire that linked major centers, carts or wagons would haul baggage, and donkeys or mules would pull carriages. These were not all grand conveyances, the more humble having wooden wheels which made (and make still) the most horrendous creaking. There were inns of varying comfort at appropriate intervals where changes of animals could be procured.¹⁹

The actual route taken by Armenian visitors to Constantinople is never described. According to the *Itinerary* attached to the seventh century Armenian *Geography*, the *mghonachapk* or “measurement of miles,” the road from Dvin to Karin (Erzerum) was 200 Roman miles (roughly 10 percent shorter than our modern miles), and a further 100 miles to the frontier ditch. The road then proceeded to Coloneia (90 miles) and Niksar (Neocaesarea, 100 miles). Next appeared Amasia (80 miles), Gangra (another 105 miles), and Angora (Ankara, 80 miles). From there, it was a final 120 miles to Constantinople (which is wrong, the variant of 320 miles being more accurate).²⁰ This is a northerly route. Since Koriun says that Mashtots stopped at Melitene on the way, he must have gone directly west from there to Caesarea, then up to Angora and along the main road to Constantinople. A century earlier, Gregory the Illuminator had traveled to Caesarea for consecration as the first bishop for Armenia. According to Agatangelos, he was accompanied by an impressive escort of nobles. Gregory was put in the royal carriage, which was drawn by mules. But his route is not described. On his return Gregory passed through Sebaste,

¹⁸ Gabriele Winkler, *Koriwns Biographie des Mesrop Maštoc'* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1994), pp. 329-30.

¹⁹ See Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1994), ch. 11.

²⁰ Armenian text in *Anania Shirakatsu matenagrutyune* [Anania Shirakatsi's Bibliography], ed. Ashot Abrahamyan (Erevan: Matenadaran, 1944), pp. 355-56; trans. Robert H. Hewsen, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxarhac 'oyc')* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1992), pp. 320-21. Note that the 320 miles from Angora to Constantinople does appear in a variant reading, whereas the text has 120 miles.

northeast of Caesarea, and from there, passing many stages, he reached Armenia.²¹

The term in Armenian for stage, *awtevank*, means both a day's distance and the inn where one lodged for the night. The *Buzandaran* mentions such inns in Armenia being established by Catholicos Nerses I (353-73).²² When Koriun describes the journey of Mashtots to Constantinople he uses similar expressions. On leaving Melitene, he mounted a public *andrvan*;²³ while on the return he traveled along the imperial road in a carriage provided by the emperor (*i despaks ev i kars arkunaturs*). Not every Armenian visitor to Constantinople traveled in such luxury!

The historian Sebeos refers to official travel warrants in his description of the return to Armenia of Atat, prince of the Khor-khorunik, in the early seventh century.²⁴ Summoned to Constantinople to provide military support for the imperial army in Thrace, Atat had traveled there with seventy retainers. But after his reception in the capital, while on his way northwest to Thrace he resolved to rebel, to return to Armenia, and to throw in his lot with the Persian shah: "Turning aside from the road, he made his way to the coast [that is, the west coast of the Black Sea], and encountering a ship he said to the sailors: 'Take me across to the other side, because I have been sent on an important task by the emperor.' He duped the sailors who took him across." All travelers who had an imperial warrant traveled free on the Roman system. Presumably Atat pretended that he had such a document, which obliged the sailors to accommodate him and his escort. Koriun states clearly that Mashtots had an imperial warrant for his travels and that when he reached Greek territory he was received by the imperial governor, Anatolius, who sent word to the capital and received an official reply. Anatolius is well known. At this time he was the *magister militiae orientis* and later a high official in

²¹ Agatangelos, *Patmutiun Hayots*, §§791-808.

²² *Buzandaran*, Bk V, ch. 31, where the expression used is *awtaratunk*, literally, "rest houses for strangers."

²³ Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, ed. Manuk Abegyan (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1941; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1985), with English translation by Bedros Norehad, ch. 16, pp. 66, 68. For a German translation of both recensions of Koriun with extensive commentary, see Winkler, *Koriwns Biographie*.

²⁴ Sebeos, *Patmutiun*, p. 104.

the capital.²⁵ Eghishe mentions him as being unfriendly to the Armenian delegation in 450, and as an appeaser of the Persians.²⁶

Mashtots and Translations from Greek

In Constantinople, Mashtots would have had no difficulty in communicating with imperial officials, for in his youth he had received a good Greek education.²⁷ On this visit he was accompanied by Gint, bishop of Derjan on the upper Euphrates west of Karin on the Greek side of the border. Gint, too, would have been a fluent speaker of Greek. They were lodged at the monastery of the Akoimetoi, the “sleepless” monks, which was famous for its library.²⁸ Mashtots and Gint obtained from the emperor official authorization to establish schools in western Armenia for youths to learn the new script and to be trained to use it for the conduct of services in church.²⁹ According to Koriun, before Mashtots returned to Armenia proper, “he acquired many inspired books of the Fathers of the church” to deepen his knowledge further.³⁰ Koriun implies that Mashtots brought these books from Constantinople, which in turn reinforces the description of his continuous zeal, from the time of the invention of the script until his death, in making available in Armenian the treasures of Greek (and Syriac) religious literature.

Some years after his visit, Mashtots sent further disciples to Constantinople: Ghevond, Eznik, and his biographer to be, Koriun.³¹ Koriun informs that they brought back to Armenia copies of the Bible, the canons of the councils of Nicaea and Ephesus, and the

²⁵ See *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, ed. J.R. Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 84-86, s.v. “Anatolius.”

²⁶ Eghishe, *Vasn Vardanay*, pp. 61, 124.

²⁷ Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, p. 36.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 64. For the library of the monastery of the Akoimetoi, see Paul Peeters, *Le trésor oriental de l’hagiographie byzantine* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1950), pp. 150-51.

²⁹ Cf. the later account in Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, Bk III, chs. 57-58 and the commentary on Koriun by Winkler, *Koriwns Biographie*. No Greek source confirms the account of Koriun. Would the dissemination of Armenian written works have enjoyed imperial patronage? Perhaps this would not have been a problem until the policy of Justinian I in the sixth century to integrate the Armenian provinces into the empire.

³⁰ Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, p. 68.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 74-76.

testaments (*ktakaran*) of the Holy Church.³² Koriun adds that Catholicos Sahak relied on these new copies of the Bible to revise earlier translations and that Sahak translated many commentaries. These books, at least, must have been in their original Greek versions, although whether Koriun and his colleagues translated the other works in Constantinople and brought back copies in Armenian is not clear. In fact, many works were translated from Greek (and Syriac), but the actual locations of these translations are rarely known. Nor is information available as to whether the originals were brought to Armenia or the new translations. During his patriarchate, Sahak coordinated this activity in Vagharshapat. But after his death, and that of Mashtots, there are no references to organized translating or to the circulation of Greek books in Armenia.³³

The kinds of books that were brought from Constantinople had broader implications. In the first place, Koriun stresses the Bible and indicates that Catholicos Sahak directed a revision of the earlier translation based on these copies from the Byzantine capital, considered the authoritative source of the most reliable text. Twice he emphasizes that these Greek copies were more authoritative (*hastatun*) than the previous rendering into Armenian based on Syriac texts.³⁴ Sahak also translated many commentaries on the Bible.

Further, Koriun refers to the works of the Church fathers but fails to mention the authors which were translated. Space does not permit here to name all the texts which could be ascribed to the fifth century.³⁵ What is significant in this regard is that the Ar-

³² The “testaments” cannot refer to the Old and New Testaments since the Bible was just mentioned; they are presumably works of patristic theology.

³³ The question of coordinated activity is relevant for the development of the later style of translation called “Philhellene,” discussed below. There is no direct evidence whether the similarity of style in these translations was deliberately controlled or was more or less spontaneous on the part of the translators.

³⁴ Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, p. 76. There is a large bibliography of modern studies on the text of the Armenian biblical translation. Since the Bible was not translated at one go, the versions of the different books show different models in Syriac and Greek. There were also revisions over time. For a brief bibliography see Robert W. Thomson, *A Bibliography of Classical Armenian Literature to 1500 AD* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), pp. 235-49: “Apocrypha” and “Bible.” Note also the very extensive bibliography in Hakob S. Anasyan, *Haykakan matenagrutyun* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, 1976), vol. 2, cols. 305-670.

³⁵ For the foreign authors, see Thomson, *Bibliography*, pp. 29-88: “Translations

menians rapidly absorbed much of the Greek theological traditions of the fourth and early fifth century. Great figures such as Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzenus, Basil of Caesarea, and John Chrysostom, who had expounded the meaning of the Christian faith in terms of current Greek philosophy and set the foundations of orthodoxy, were accepted as authorities for the Armenian exposition of faith.³⁶ Their works were also cited in defense of the Armenian positions after the age of Sahak and Mashtots, when doctrinal conflicts developed between the churches of the eastern Christian world. In the realm of historical writing, the historians Eusebius and Socrates Scholasticus were held up as models.³⁷ Remarkably soon the Armenians formed their own canon of orthodox writings. Although they continued for centuries to translate new texts from Greek, these were rarely the works of contemporary Byzantine theologians or historians, but were mostly patristic texts written prior to the Council of Chalcedon which had not yet been made available in Armenian.³⁸

into Armenian." Note also Levon Ter-Petrosyan, *Hay hin targmanakan grakanutyun* (Erevan: Matenadaran, 1984), which has been translated into several languages; English version by Krikor Maksoudian, in Levon Ter Petrosian, *Ancient Armenian Translations* (New York: Saint Vartan Press, 1992). See also Constantine Zuckerman, *A Repertory of Published Armenian Translations of Classical Texts* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995). For exegetical texts, see Jean-Pierre Mahé, "Traduction et exégèse: Réflexions sur l'exemple arménien," *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont* (Geneva: Patrick Cramer, 1988), pp. 243-55. Nerses Akinian dated translations of the following authors to the fifth century on the basis of style alone: the Bible, John Chrysostom, Severian of Gabala, Eusebius of Emesa, Cyril of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Eusebius of Caesarea, Evagrius of Pontus, Hippolytus of Bostra, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Aristides of Athens, Ephrem the Syrian, Afrahat, Zenob of Amida, Aithalla of Urha, Labubna, and letters by Proclus of Constantinople, and Acacius of Amida. See Nerses Akinian, "Hay matenagrutian oskedare" [The Golden Age of Armenian Literature], *Handes Amsorya* 46 (1932): 105-28.

³⁶ The Armenian versions of Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzenus reflect an early stage of the "Philhellene" style of translation and may be of the sixth rather than the fifth century. The only modern critical edition of these patristic authors is that of Gregory's works, currently directed by Bernard Coulie, of which three volumes have appeared to date. For an overview, see Guy Lafontaine and Bernard Coulie, *La version arménienne des discours de Grégoire de Nazianze* (Louvain: Peeters, 1983).

³⁷ Socrates carried the story of the church from the time of Constantine, where Eusebius left off, down to the time of Theodosius II. For the Armenian version and the later adaptation, see notes 3, 13 above.

³⁸ There is an Armenian version of the *Hexaemeron* by the seventh-century George of Pisidia, but no Armenian translation of any of the noted Byzantine historians, such as Procopius, Agathias, and Theophanes.

Finally, with respect to ecclesiastical authority enshrined in written texts, Koriun explicitly refers to the canons of the church councils of Nicaea and Ephesus. The Council of Nicaea (325) was summoned by the emperor Constantine for various reasons but primarily to deal with the conflict caused by Arius and his views about the Trinity, which were condemned as heretical. This is alluded to in the *Buzandaran*, where the holy status of Constantine is emphasized.³⁹ Agatangelos, too, describes this first ecumenical council and the presence of Gregory's son Aristakes as the Armenian representative.⁴⁰ He notes that Aristakes brought back the canons of Nicaea, to which Gregory made additions appropriate to the situation in Armenia. But since Agatangelos was writing after Koriun and borrows a great deal of descriptive material from his predecessor,⁴¹ it is not clear how well known these canons were in Armenia before the time of Catholicos Sahak. When the *Buzandaran* describes the work of Catholicos Nerses, it refers only to the Apostolic canons which he imposed as normative. In any event, there could have been no written Armenian translation of any canons until the time of Mashtots.

The Council of Ephesus (431) took place in the time of Mash-tots himself. It was summoned by Theodosius II to deal with the opinions of Nestorius about the nature of Christ. No representative from central Armenia attended this council,⁴² but immediately following it there was extensive correspondence between the Armenian and Greek ecclesiastical leaders about the theological issues involved.⁴³ The Council of Ephesus was in fact the third of

³⁹ *Buzandaran*, Bk III, ch. 10.

⁴⁰ Agatangelos, *Patmutiun Hayots*, §§884-85. For bishops from areas around central Armenia present at Nicaea, see Nina G. Garsoian, "Some Preliminary Precisions on the Separation of the Armenian and Imperial Churches: I. The Presence of 'Armenian' Bishops at the First Five Ecumenical Councils," *Kathegetria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey on Her Eightieth Birthday* (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1988), pp. 258-63.

⁴¹ For the relationship between the Armenian text of Agatangelos in its present form and Koriun, see the Introduction to Thomson, *Agathangelos*.

⁴² For bishops at Ephesus from the regions of Melitene and Amida, see Garsoian, "Some Preliminary Precisions," pp. 263-65.

⁴³ These letters are collected in the *Girk tghots* [Book of Letters]. There are two editions of the Armenian texts, Hovsep Izmiriants (Tiflis: Tparan Rotiniants, 1901) and Norayr Pogharian (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1994). For French translations of the Armenian-Greek correspondence, see Nina G. Garsoian, *L'Eglise arménienne et le grand schisme d'orient* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp. 412-37, and ch. 2, "Les crises

the “ecumenical” councils. The second of these, which Koriun does not mention, was held at Constantinople in 381, at the end of the prolonged Arian controversy. Although no representative from central Armenia had participated at this council, later Armenian historians erroneously asserted that the patriarch Nerses attended, even though he had died eight years earlier. The presence of Nerses in the capital for other reasons is described at some length in the *Buzandaran*, leading to some confusion.⁴⁴

The decisions of these three councils had a pivotal role in defining the orthodox faith and in condemning heresy. To these councils the Armenians always remained committed. In the correspondence of succeeding centuries, much of it preserved in the famous *Book of Letters*, Armenian theologians continued to base their position on this foundation, refusing to accept the “innovations” of Chalcedon, the fourth ecumenical council, held in 451. Their interpretation of Ephesus was much influenced by contacts with Constantinople in the time of Sahak and Mashtots, with permanent effects for the creation of Armenian orthodoxy.⁴⁵

In their quest for learning and scholarship, Armenians did not frequent only Constantinople. Prior to Mashtots, young Armenians had studied at universities elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. The famed teacher Libanius at Antioch, for example, had a succession of Armenian pupils spanning two generations. Prohaeresius from eastern Armenia made a name for himself as a teacher in Athens; and Armenians are mentioned in Beirut.⁴⁶ Koriun notes that Mashtots sent students to Melitene and Syria.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Constantinople remained the source of learning par excellence, and this included secular as well as theological studies.

et la transformation du V^e siècle,” pp. 45-134.

⁴⁴ *Buzandaran*, Bk IV, chs. 5-11; cf. Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, Bk III, ch. 33. Nerses died in 373; see Garsoian, *Epic Histories*, pp. 395-96.

⁴⁵ Here the influence of Constantinople is emphasized. But for a full understanding of early Armenian theology, the influence of Syrian traditions (not least in matters of practice and ritual) must also be taken into account. See Garsoian, *L’Eglise arménienne*, ch. 2.

⁴⁶ See Robert W. Thomson, “The Formation of the Armenian Literary Tradition,” in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. Nina G. Garsoian, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robert W. Thomson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), pp. 135-50.

⁴⁷ Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, p. 64.

Influence of Greek Texts on Armenian Literature

Eznik Koghpatsi, who was in Constantinople with Koriun, was the first to compose in Armenian an original treatise in which philosophical themes based on classical learning are addressed. The wide range of authors on whom Eznik drew includes a few pagan writers as well as many Christian ones. He was clearly familiar with most of these texts in the original and presumably had put his time of study in Constantinople to good use.⁴⁸ Ironically, despite being the first study of free will and the nature of evil in Armenian, it was not much quoted in later times, perhaps because the main topic—the conflict of Christian with non-Christian philosophies—soon became outdated. After the fifth century, Armenians were no longer concerned with refuting Zoroastrianism or pagan views, but rather with refuting Christian views inimical to their own positions. Be that as it may, it was not until Anania Shirakatsi (Ananias of Shirak) that more precise information was compiled about scientific studies. His brief *Autobiography* provides a good starting point, even though he lived in the seventh century, two hundred years after Mashtots.⁴⁹

Anania Shirakatsi states that he had studied Armenian literature and wished to pursue philosophy, especially the science of numbers which he considered the mother of all knowledge. Finding no one to assist him in central Armenia, he went to Roman Armenia, only to discover that the teacher there had limited skills. After six months, he decided to further his studies in Constantinople; however, before his journey he met some acquaintances coming from the Byzantine capital, who were traveling to Trebizond to study with the Greek scholar Tychikos. Anania

⁴⁸ See Louis Mariès, “Le *De Deo* d’Eznik de Kolb connu sous le nom de ‘Contre les sectes’: Etudes de critique littéraire et textuelle,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 4 (1924): 113-205; 5 (1925): 13-130; also reprinted separately (Paris: Imp. nationale, 1924). Cf. Levon Ter Petrosyan, “Eprem Asoru ‘Hobi meknutyune’ Eznik Koghba-tsu aghbyurnerits [Ephrem the Syrian’s ‘Commentary on Job’ as a Source for Eznik of Koghb],” *Bamber Matenadarani* 16 (1994): 7-15; trans. Monica J. Blanchard and Robin Darling Young, *A Treatise on God Written in Armenian by Eznik of Kolb* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

⁴⁹ Armenian text in Ashot Abrahamyan, *Anania Shirakatsu matenagrutyune* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1944), pp. 206-09; trans. Haïg Berbérian, “Autobiographie d’Anania Shirakats’i,” *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s. 1 (1964): 189-94.

joined them to study mathematics.⁵⁰

When he met Tychikos in Trebizond, Anania was surprised that his Greek teacher was fluent in Armenian. In his brief biographical account of Tychikos, Anania notes that Tychikos had learned Armenian when on military service in Armenia. He was wounded in battle when the Persians attacked Antioch (around 606-07), and on recovering he decided to devote himself to scholarship. He spent three years in Egypt, one year in Rome, and then completed his training in Constantinople before returning home to Trebizond.⁵¹

Learning and scholarship in Armenia based on Greek models necessitated translation of the basic textbooks used in the universities of the late Roman Empire. By the time of Anania Shirakatsi, the standard curriculum consisted of courses on grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy (the trivium), followed by the four sciences of logic, physics, mathematics, and theology (the quadrivium).⁵² The trivium was essential in preparing for a career in the law or the civil service, while higher learning was based on the quadrivium. The standard works on grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy were soon rendered into Armenian, and some of these texts were influential over a long period. The introductory book of philosophy by Davit Anhaght (David the Invincible), for example, was used in Armenian schools for more than a thousand years.⁵³

These technical treatises were translated into Armenian in a more literal fashion than the biblical and patristic texts mentioned above. The translators, sacrificing good Armenian style for a word-to-word rendering, created new Armenian words to render the Greek technical expressions, a style commonly referred to as

⁵⁰ Anania describes these persons as *tsanawtik*, which in his French rendering Berbérian translates as “compatriotes.” But Anania does not explicitly indicate whether they were Armenians, Greeks, or of other national origin. Nonetheless, since Anania had not visited Constantinople, “acquaintances” were most likely to have been fellow Armenians.

⁵¹ This grand tour has echoes in Armenian texts, as discussed below.

⁵² On this subject, see the important study of Jean-Pierre Mahé, “Quadrivium et cursus d’études au VII^e siècle en Arménie et dans le monde byzantin,” *Travaux et mémoires* 10 (1987): 159-206.

⁵³ See Bridget Kendall and Robert W. Thomson, *Definitions and Divisions of Philosophy by David the Invincible Philosopher* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. xx-xxi.

“Philhellene.” Opinions vary as to the exact purpose of such a method of translation; the writing appears quite artificial and often becomes incomprehensible. Clearly, every language changes and adapts itself to new times and problems. Over the centuries many innovations were absorbed into standard Armenian, while others were omitted and lost.

Concerning the connection of these books with Constantinople, unfortunately, despite years of efforts to analyze the numerous products of the Philhellene style, their grammar and syntax, and their linguistic innovations, practically nothing is known as to the identity of the translators, who translated what, where, or when. The main difficulty in this regard is that the information about Armenians engaged in such studies abroad are largely derived not from their contemporaries but from later authors who in many cases were influenced by legends concerning the disciples of Mashtots. In general, however, the main works of the Philhellene style may be dated to the sixth and seventh centuries, and a connection with Constantinople is more likely than with the other major centers such as Antioch, Beirut, or Alexandria.⁵⁴

Although Anania Shirakatsi never reached Constantinople, his *Autobiography* mentions acquaintances who had been in that city. Also in the seventh century the historian Sebeos refers to Davit from Bagrevand, who had not only visited Constantinople but made a career there. In 649, Davit brought a letter from the emperor Constans II and the Greek patriarch to the Armenians, which prompted a gathering of Armenian bishops at Dvin; Sebeos records the long response they composed on that occasion.⁵⁵ Davit is said to have become versed in the art of philosophy at Constantinople. He was clearly a Chalcedonian Armenian, since he

⁵⁴ The use of the term “school” for this style of translation is rather misleading, as there is no evidence of any central direction in organizing such activity. For a general overview of the main characteristics of this style, see Charles Mercier, “L’école hellénistique dans la littérature arménienne,” *Revue des études arménienes* n.s. 13 (1978/79): 59-75. Abraham Terian places its activity in Constantinople. See his “The Hellenizing School: Its Time, Place and Scope of Activities Reconsidered,” in Garsoïan, Mathews, Thomson, *East of Byzantium*, pp. 175-86. Further bibliography appears in Thomson, *Bibliography*, pp. 22-27.

⁵⁵ Sebeos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 148-61. On this response and the question of the authenticity of the text in Sebeos, see Robert W. Thomson, “The Defence of Armenian Orthodoxy in Sebeos,” in *AETOS: Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango*, ed. Ihor Sevcenko and Imgard Hutter (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1998), pp. 329-41.

was entrusted with an official mission, but no further details about his origins or career are given.

One of the most important Armenian scholars to visit Constantinople and return to his homeland was Stepannos, later bishop of Siunik. He is attested in Constantinople between the years 712 and 718 both by later Armenian historians and by colophons to the translations he made there. Siunik, east and south of Lake Sevan, was a large area whose relationship to central Armenia, Ayrarat, remained ambiguous for many centuries. Its metropolitan bishops cherished a certain independence, which the catholicoses in Echmiadzin were not always happy to concede. In his patriotic *History of Siunik*, Stepannos Orbelian, bishop of Siunik from 1287 to about 1309—that is, nearly six hundred years after the above-mentioned Stepannos—devoted a lengthy chapter to his predecessor.⁵⁶ According to the historian, the young Stepannos was teaching theology at the seminary at Dvin when he became engaged in a theological dispute with the duophysite *aspēt* or military commander of Armenia, Smbat Bagratuni. Lack-
ing sufficient knowledge of the philosophical arts, Stepannos lost the argument and therefore decided to go to Constantinople for further studies.

Whatever the veracity of this explanation, the colophons of his translations leave no doubt that Stepannos completed Armenian versions of three important works of philosophical theology in Constantinople. The first is the corpus of texts attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, who at that time was universally considered to be the Dionysius who became a Christian after hearing Saint Paul preach in Athens. In fact, the texts are of the late fifth century and are much indebted to neoplatonic ideas.⁵⁷ The other two texts translated by Stepannos were Gregory of Nyssa's *Treatise on the Formation of Man* and the similar work by Bishop

⁵⁶ Stepannos Orbelian, *Patmutiun nahangin Sisakan* [History of the Province of Siunik] (Tiflis: N. Aghaniants, 1910), ch. 31; trans. Marie Brosset, *Histoire de la Siounie par Stépannos Orbélian* (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1864).

⁵⁷ For the Armenian version, see Robert W. Thomson, *The Armenian Version of the Works Attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite* [Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 488 and 489, Scriptores Armeniaci, 17 (text) and 18 (translation)] (Leuven: Peeters, 1987). The Introduction to the volume of text presents the colophons and other evidence for the work of Stepannos.

Nemesius of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man*. These writings had a significant impact on medieval Armenian thought, as some of the major activities of monasteries like Tatev and Gladzor involved the study of such philosophical texts and the writing of commentaries on them. Much of this activity still remains to be properly studied, and the medieval commentaries remain mostly unpublished.

Stepannos did not work alone in Constantinople. He was assisted by a certain David, “consul and kinarios of the royal table,” who was not unknown to the Byzantine world. A seal dated to the first quarter of the eighth century gives his name and the title “royal kinarios” (that is, “butler”).⁵⁸ Whether or not he was also an Armenian cannot be determined; as in the case of Tychikos, it was not unknown for a Greek to know the Armenian language. But the colophons definitely state that David and Stepannos worked together on the translations.

The travels of Stepannos are described in more elaborate detail by later historians. Curiously, the tradition of his going as far as Rome is first reported by Movses Daskhurantsi, the tenth century historian of the Aghvank, another region whose relationship with central Armenia was ambiguous. Like Stepannos Orbelian, Movses Daskhurantsi recorded many traditions and legends concerning the earlier history of the outlying regions, which often are at variance with the received tradition in Ayrarat. According to his account, after the debate between Stepannos and Smbat Bagratuni, Stepannos traveled to Constantinople to study.⁵⁹ Smbat sent word to the emperor that Stepannos was a heretic, and when he was arraigned before the emperor, Stepannos asked for the chests of books to be opened. There he found a book on the Faith (Movses does not mention the title). The emperor then sent him to Rome to fetch three further books of similar content. On his way back, however, Stepannos avoided Constantinople altogether and headed

⁵⁸ See W. Seibt, “Kinarios - ein ‘neuer’ Würderträger an Hof des Byzantinischen Kaisers,” *Handes Amsorya* 88 (1974): 369-80; *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.v. “kinarios.” The seal is no. 600 in G. Zacos and A. Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, vol. 1 (Basel: Augustin, 1972).

⁵⁹ Movses Daskhurantsi (also known as Kaghankatuatsi), *Patmutiun Aghvanits ashkharhi*, ed. Varag Arakelyan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1983), Bk III, chs. 17-18; trans. Charles J.F. Dowsett, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxuranci* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

straight to Dvin, where he was consecrated bishop for Siunik. Daskhurantsi then appends an extremely garbled account of Homer's *Iliad* and of Virgil's *Aeneid*, tracing the succession of capitals from Troy to Rome to Constantinople.

This version of events is greatly elaborated in the *History of Siunik* by Stepannos Orbelian.⁶⁰ Not only does he have the earlier Stepannos also study in Athens (which by the eighth century was no longer a center of learning), but he also names the three books brought from Rome as writings by Cyril of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Ephrem the Syrian, all classic patristic texts. The point of the story is to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the Armenians and the willingness of the Greek emperor to accept that faith as defined by authoritative fathers of the church.

Legendary details about visits to Constantinople by Armenians from the entourage of Mashtots share a common purpose with the fabled travels of Stepannos—namely, to bolster the Armenian claim to orthodoxy against the Greek imperial church. Two figures play central roles, Movses Khorenatsi and Davit Anhaght (the Invincible). In his *History of the Armenians*, Movses Khorenatsi described his own travels as a student. He claims to have been sent by Sahak and Mashtots to study at the academy in Alexandria. He gives a rhetorical description of that city, contrasting the pagan deities of its past with the Christian worship of his own day. Returning by way of Greece, Movses Khorenatsi says his ship was blown off course to Rome, where he visited the tombs of Peter and Paul. Subsequently, he stayed at Athens for a while and then moved on to Constantinople. There he learned of the death of Sahak and Mashtots and returned disconsolate to Armenia.⁶¹

Movses Khorenatsi refers to the cities where in the fifth century important schools of philosophy existed, although Alexandria (unlike Athens or Constantinople) is not mentioned by other Armenian sources in this context. The sketchy account given by the historian, however, was insufficient for later historians, who record much more elaborate details of the travels of Movses Khorenatsi and his companions. By the eleventh century, the outline of these legendary additions had been fleshed out. According

⁶⁰ Stepannos Orbelian, *History of Siunik*, ch. 31.

⁶¹ Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, Bk III, ch. 62.

to the historian Asoghik (that is, Stepannos of Taron), Movses Khorenatsi had a brother Mambre, who is also mentioned earlier by Tovma Artsruni, and among his disciples was David.⁶² The three had traveled abroad together. By the thirteenth century, the chronicler Vardan had associated their travels with the defense of Armenian orthodoxy, which they successfully accomplished in debates against the Greeks.⁶³ In a colophon of 1297, written in Cilicia,⁶⁴ it is even claimed that both Movses and David had taught philosophy in Athens. This represents the adaptation to Armenian hagiography of the presence as students of Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzenus in Athens. Their works were well known in Armenia, and many centuries after their death the same pattern of travel for study was attributed to great figures of the Armenian past.

The important point here is that Armenians, too, studied in the notable universities of the ancient world. By the sixth century, Christian Constantinople had taken the place of pagan Athens. From the time of Mashtots, there was regular traffic between the Byzantine capital and Armenia, as Armenians visited that city to study. Some remained, like Davit from Bagrevand, while others returned with books that they had translated from Greek, like Stepannos of Siunik. More than any other center of learning, Constantinople provided the impetus for broadening Armenian interests into patristic and secular literature. Of course, this is not to neglect the Syriac legacy which strongly influenced the early Armenian Church and Armenian culture generally. Constanti-

⁶² Stepannos Taronetsi, *Patmutiun tiezerakan*, ed. Stepan Malkhasian (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1885), Bk II, ch. 2; trans. Edouard Dulaquier, *Etienne Asoghig de Daron: Histoire universelle* (Paris: Leroux, 1883), Bks I-II; Frédéric Macler, *Etienne Asolik de Taron: Histoire universelle* (Paris: Leroux, 1917), Bk III; Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutiun tann Artsruniats*, ed. Kerobe Patkanian (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1887; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1991), p. 44; trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni: History of the House of the Artsrunik'* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985).

⁶³ Vardan Areveltsi, *Havakumn patmutian Hayots*, ed. Ghevond Alishan (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1862; repr. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1991), pp. 54-55; trans. Robert W. Thomson, "The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelts'i," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 125-226.

⁶⁴ Jerusalem Ms 1303. For fuller details of these legends, see Kendall and Thomson, *Definitions*, p. xvii; Robert W. Thomson, "A quoi Movses Xorenac'i doit-il sa réputation?" *Movses Xorenac'i et l'historiographie arménienne des origines*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Antelias: Catholicosate of Cilicia, 2000), pp. 55-70.

nople, however, exercised paramount influence on Armenian learning and scholarship. The Armenian evidence from the first two or three centuries after Mashtots is rather scanty, and later historians added much legendary material to what little their predecessors had recorded. Nonetheless, even the legends point to the significance of the Constantinopolitan connection and the enduring respect paid to that city as "the mother of the sciences."